



TEXAS JUVENILE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

TRANSFORMING YOUNG LIVES AND CREATING SAFER COMMUNITIES

Response to the Independent Ombudsman First Quarter Report, FY 2018 January 5, 2018

The Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) has received the FY 18 First Quarter Report from the Office of the Independent Ombudsman (OIO), and appreciates the opportunity to respond.

The OIO received 45 complaints from TJJD institutions during the first quarter, dispersed across multiple topic categories. The vast majority of complaints, 93.3%, came from TJJD youth and more than 70% of those occurred spontaneously during site visit interviews with OIO staff. Relatively few complaints came from youths' families or TJJD staff. Considering all complaints, it is significant that no single institutional placement generated more than one complaint to the OIO about safety concerns.

The OIO closed more than double the number of state operations cases during the first quarter of FY18 (52) compared to the first quarter of FY17 (23). While cases determined to be "founded" increased by one in FY18, the number of unfounded cases increased by 27, a 540% increase. While the significant increase in unfounded cases is of interest and worthy of further exploration, it also suggests that youth feel free to express their concerns without fear of repercussions.

The quarter was also remarkable for news media reports about arrests of staff from Gainesville State School and subsequent help from the Texas Rangers to assess the extent of alleged misconduct. TJJD welcomes and is grateful for the valuable assistance of the Texas Rangers. Safety of the youth and staff is our top priority. The overwhelming majority of staff are dedicated workers who strive daily to provide a healthy environment for youth. When we find bad actors without the best interest of youth at heart, our intent is to react swiftly in a manner that ensures youth safety and deals with misconduct to the fullest extent of the law.

Daily programming has continued at Gainesville State School in the midst of inquiries. The facility hosted a graduation ceremony November 17, 2017 in which 86 youth received the following awards: 4 high school diplomas; 32 high school equivalency degrees; and 123 industry certifications. (Some youth may have earned awards at previous locations.) Youth who participated in the school's football program through TAPPS Division III won the following District III awards: Defensive Most Valuable Player; 4 First Team All-District awards; 5 Second Team All-District awards; and 7 Honorable Mention District awards. In addition, 57 family members and 11 mentors attended a Family Day event with Gainesville youth on October 27. Finally, the facility dedicated its new Equine Assisted Psychotherapy program opening on site at Tornado Ranch. The program is an adjunct therapeutic program to the site's Pairing Achievement

with Service (PAWS) program that fosters rescue dogs and prepares them to become service dogs for people with disabilities. The equine program offers an innovative approach for reaching youth who do not respond well to traditional therapy programs, and who may present with complex trauma, attachment disorders and mood disorders.

Activities at Gainesville reflect TJJD's sustainability phase of the Youth in Custody Practice Model. This work will continue to result in better overall re-entry planning, improvements to case management, more developmentally appropriate experiences for youth, and more family-centered practices that can motivate and sustain the progress youth make in treatment.

As always, TJJD appreciates the opportunity to respond to the OIO and looks forward to sharing updates on efforts that continue to move the agency effectively forward.